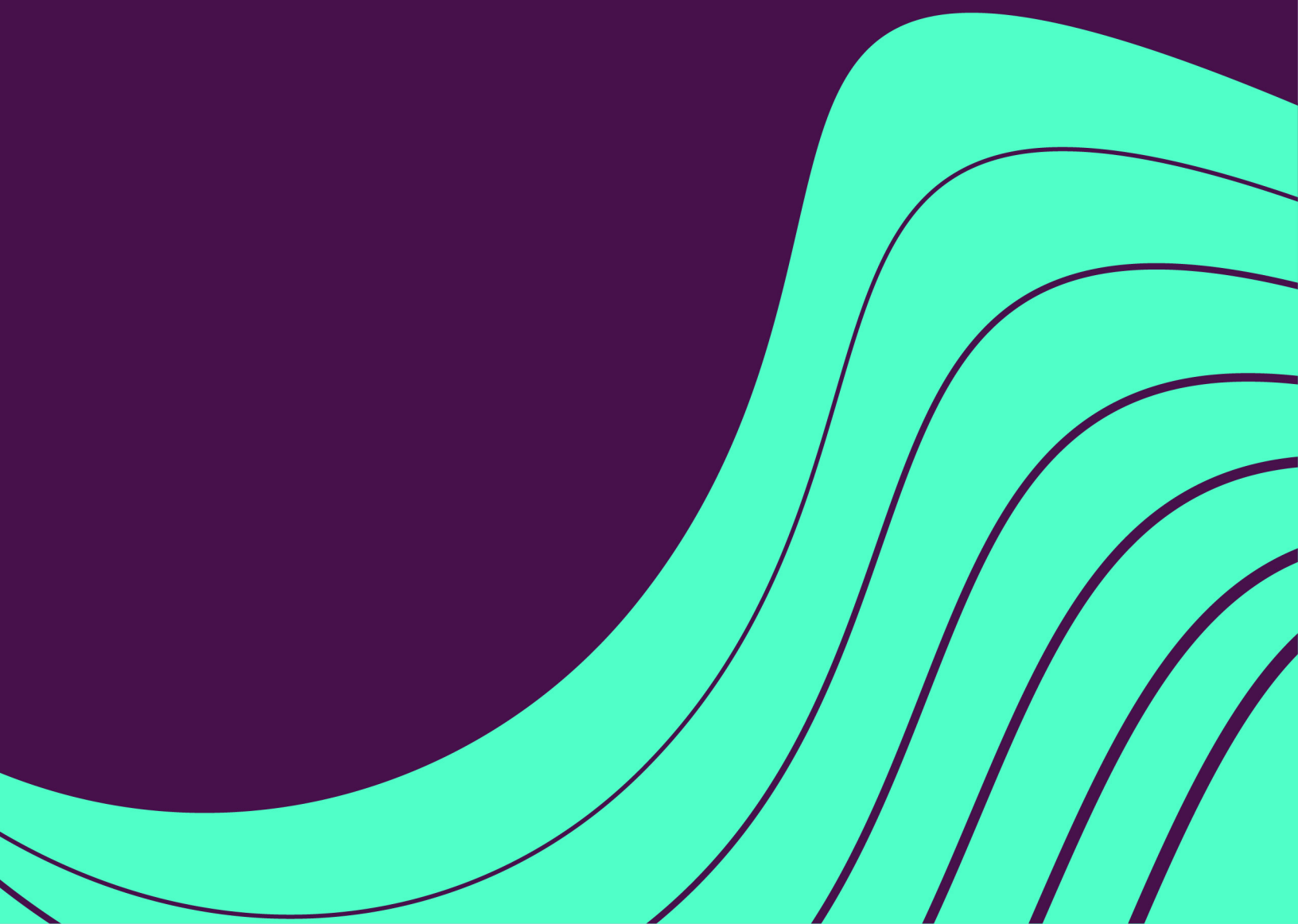


Guide

Implications of COVID-19 and Bias

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Implications of Covid-19 and Bias

The COVID-19 situation continues to evolve rapidly, impacting our life, our work, and society overall. These words and others like them are being shared widely: *“...because of these concerns and our primary care for the well-being of our employees, customers and community, we have made the extraordinary decision to...”*

While COVID-19 and crises like these have far-reaching impact, there are also immediate and direct implications for Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) champions and the work we do. History has shown that outbreaks have been a cause for social stigma, discrimination, blame and xenophobia. For example, in the past, we have seen the Latinx community stigmatized for swine flu, Blacks blamed for Ebola, and the LGBTQ community discriminated against for AIDS. With COVID-19, we are seeing a sharp increase in aggression and blame toward Asians.

Stigma can also occur when a person tests positive for the virus or has been released from quarantine. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), even after a person has been released from quarantine and declared healthy, there can be fear of associating with them and negative behavior toward them. This can impact the mental health of those already coping with having had the disease as well as their ability to function in society.

As leaders and as champions of D&I, during a time of crisis it is important to be an UPSTANDER, not a bystander.

Being an Upstander means taking initiative to educate, share accurate data, and speak up when seeing or hearing people being stigmatized or harassed. In the current situation, stopping discrimination and harassment isn't just a case of doing “the right thing to do”. The World Health Organization (WHO) has found that historically stigmatized groups are more reluctant to seek medical treatment when symptomatic because of fear of harm and violence. Such stigma can undermine social cohesion and prompt possible social isolation of groups, which might contribute to a situation where the virus is more, not less, likely to spread. If people are trying to hide their illness to avoid discrimination, they are less likely to get tested or treated.

To help people to understand the larger context of the current state of xenophobia and racism directed at Asian and Asian-American people, we recommend NPR Codeswitch's recent episode, [When Xenophobia Spreads Like a Virus](#). It frames the current situation by looking at the history of anti-Asian racism and xenophobia in this country and shares the voices of people who have experienced this sort of hate over the last several weeks. The podcast is only 25 minutes long and would make a great conversation starter for a virtual discussion at your organization to explore these issues.

The CDC has developed a number of guidelines to reduce racism, scapegoating and stigmatizing.

- **Maintain privacy and confidentiality** of those seeking healthcare and those who may be part of any contact investigation.
- **Quickly communicate** the risk or lack of risk from associations with products, people, and places.
- **Raise awareness** about COVID-19 without increasing fear.
- **Share accurate information** about how the virus spreads.
- **Speak out against** negative behaviors, including statements on social media about groups of people, or exclusion of people who pose no risk from regular activities.
- **Be cautious about the images that are shared.** Make sure they do not reinforce stereotypes.
- **Engage with stigmatized groups** in person and through media channels including news media and social media.
- **Thank healthcare workers and responders.** People who have traveled to areas where the COVID-19 outbreak is happening to help have performed a valuable and brave service.
- **Share the need for social support** for people who have returned from China or Europe or are worried about friends or relatives in the affected region.

Source: www.cdc.gov

In addition to the historical impact of outbreaks on increasing bias and discrimination, it is also important to note that the U.S. was already experiencing increased hate crimes and racism across the country. According to Forbes and the Associated Press, hate crimes rose 9 percent across 30 major U.S. cities in 2018; in those 30 cities, more than 2,000 hate crimes were recorded. It is the steepest rise since 2015 and a 51 percent increase since the all-time low in 2013. The majority of these crimes were committed against Blacks, Jews, and LGBTQ people. Hispanics, Asians and Muslims have seen sharp increases as well.

The effect of COVID-19 stereotyping and discrimination exacerbates an already challenging environment for diversity and inclusion in the U.S. and across the world. COVID-19 does not discriminate. Times like these should be a time to unite and come together to assess implications and minimize impacts.

Women and Multicultural People Disproportionately Impacted

With restricted movement and national shutdowns, thousands of companies will temporarily close or reduce operations. From a socio-economic standpoint, as businesses shut down and schools close, there will be a disproportionate impact on women and people of color (POC) who are overrepresented in low-wage and hourly jobs. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, there are nearly 82 million hourly workers in the U.S., or nearly 60 percent of the total workforce. These same workers often lack access to benefits including healthcare and paid sick leave.

A significant portion of U.S. workers won't be able to perform their job remotely. With retail, restaurants, movie theaters, and numerous other small businesses closing across the nation, millions of employees will be without wages and tip income. Low-skill, low-wage workers, such as airline baggage handlers, hotel housekeeping, maintenance, restaurant staff, retail cashiers will all be severely impacted.

This is a time to recalibrate demands on our teams and community and consider impact on those populations that are disproportionately impacted. Many companies with hourly and part-time workers have begun to address these concerns. Walmart is providing two weeks paid sick leave and up to 26 weeks more if needed. Sodexo is providing 3 weeks paid leave for those lines of businesses impacted (e.g. schools). Companies including Urban Outfitters, Apple, Patagonia and Nike have closed their stores but are continuing to pay their employees.

Reframe Work-Life Boundaries

Establishing work-family boundaries will also present a significant challenge in the weeks and months ahead. Employees are being asked to change the way they work in fundamental ways, likely with an

increase in responsibilities. At the same time, they are facing new demands in their home life, whether it is eldercare, disability care, concerns around pre-existing health conditions, or juggling responsibilities associated with extended school closures. Success in this emerging landscape will require a culture of trust, reciprocity, encouragement, and accountability. We need to have an honest conversation about how to meet work demands and life demands. Navigating these challenges will require explicit agreements about how teams work together and support one another.

Consider establishing social contracts, among employees and teams to address these concerns.

- Determine new workflows
- Identify needs for certain hours/days/nights off
- Reallocate projects (consider workload, share of responsibilities, development opportunities)
- Identify opportunities for shared workloads/job share
- Create opportunities for training and development, upskilling (i.e. as AI and technology advances, are your employees skilled and ready to adapt?)
- Offer health and wellness sessions virtually

Some companies are reallocating staff or extending supports to help employees juggle increased life demands. For example, according to HBR, 40 restaurants, hotels and movie theaters in China banned together to "job share" their employees with a giant retail store that was short-staffed because of high online ordering and delivery needs. Among other benefits and support, Target is offering all of its team members - including those at stores, distribution centers and HQ locations - access to free back-up child care from its partner Bright Horizons. Be creative and find new ways to support employees in these challenging times.

Leverage your commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Times of crises and uncertainty can be overwhelming. Providing employees with opportunities to engage and give back through CSR can provide two-fold benefits. First, it gives your employees a sense of purpose and action. Secondly, it provides support to communities that are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. For example, in underserved communities, many families and children rely on school lunches that may not be available in a climate of extended school closures. There is unequal access to technology at home (computers, school supplies), and other child support services. Teachers and administrators may need technical support and training to deliver an effective virtual classroom.

Companies can think creatively about deepening relationships in the communities they serve to meet these and other needs. For example, as the list of nationwide K-12 schools shifting to remote learning continues to grow, Verizon is tripling data allowances to support students and teachers in its Innovative Learning program. The additional connectivity includes all tablets and laptops within the program and upgrades data plans from 10GB/month to 30GB/month for the next two months. Another example of community support could include activating your ERGs/BRG's to focus on pipeline development by connecting with next gen workers through virtual mentoring or providing on-line career days.

In the light of these unprecedented times, rethinking the implications on diversity and inclusion can also provide us with the opportunity to re-imagine how we work and how we support one another. We have attached a few additional resources for you to help navigate these challenging times. Stay healthy and stay safe.

For more information about this report and other resources available through Diversity Best Practices, please contact Donnice Peterson at: Donnice.Peterson@diversitybestpractices.com

Additional resources

[When Xenophobia Spreads Like A Virus. NPR March 2020](#)

[All That We Share](#), a powerful ad campaign launched by TV2 in Denmark highlighting commonalities across differences. We highly recommend watching the video and sharing it with employees.

Center for Positive Organizations essays: [Finding the Strength to Lead in Trying Times and Helping Your Workplace Heal.](#)

[CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)

[HBR Coronavirus Could Force Teams to Work Remotely](#)

[HBR How Chinese Companies Have Responded to the Crisis](#)